DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 482 211 SO 035 368

AUTHOR	Avery, Patricia G.
TITLE	Civic Education in the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers: Research-Based Recommendations for the Improvement of Teaching Methods Courses. ERIC Digest.
INSTITUTION	ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Bloomington, IN.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
REPORT NO	EDO-SO-2003-15
PUB DATE	2003-12-00
NOTE	4p.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0016
AVAILABLE FROM	ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, 2805 East Tenth Street, Suite 120, Bloomington, IN 47408. Tel: 800-266-3815 (Toll Free); Fax: 812-855-0455; e-mail: ericso@indiana.edu; Web site: http://ericso.indiana.edu.
PUB TYPE	ERIC Publications (071) -- ERIC Digests in Full Text (073)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Citizenship Education; Educational Research; *Methods Courses; *Political Issues; Political Science; Secondary Education; Social Studies; *Teacher Education; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS	ERIC Digests; *Social Studies Teachers; Student Engagement

ABSTRACT

Recent research in civic education suggests much for shaping and focusing secondary social studies methods course work. This Digest: (1) provides an overview of selected findings from recent studies of secondary students' civic understanding and engagement; and (2) offers five research-based suggestions for social studies methods instructors. Lists nine references. (BT)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

Civic Education in the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers: Research-Based Recommendations for the Improvement of Teaching Methods Courses. ERIC Digest.

Patricia G. Avery

ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education, Bloomington, IN.
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.

ED 482 211

SO 035 368

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☒ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ERIC Educational Resources Information Center

Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education

DIGEST

http://ericso.indiana.edu

2805 East Tenth Street, Suite 120 Indiana University Bloomington, Indiana 47408 812-855-3838 · 800-266-3815

EDO-SO-2003-15 December 2003

Civic Education in the Preparation of Social Studies Teachers: Research-Based Recommendations for the Improvement of Teaching Methods Courses

By Patricia G. Avery

Recent research in civic education suggests much for shaping and focusing secondary social studies methods course work. This Digest (1) provides an overview of selected findings from recent studies of young people's civic understanding and engagement, and (2) offers five research-based suggestions for social studies methods instructors.

Young People's Political Engagement and Enlightenment. A pattern emerging across the research on youth and citizenship in the United States of America is the limited nature of young people's understandings and commitments. A recent international study indicated that American 14-year-olds are likely to have a good grasp of the basic principles of democracy; they recognize what is good for a democracy (e.g., "Everyone has the right to express their opinions freely"), and what might not bode as well (e.g., "One company owns all the newspapers") (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, and Schulz 2001). When pressed, however, they are unlikely either to know profoundly the basic democratic principles or to understand how those principles relate to one another (e.g., How is freedom of speech related to the public good?) (Sinatra, Beck, and McKeown 1992).

Some researchers characterize students' conception of citizenship as "minimalist" (Conover and Searing 2001, 103). Young people believe that voting is an important part of being a good citizen, but they are unlikely to envision themselves participating in some of the more difficult political activities, such as writing a letter to the editor or joining a political party. They demonstrate a fair amount of knowledge about the rights associated with citizenship in a democracy, but often personalize those rights ("I can say what I want") and have little appreciation for the responsibilities associated with them.

Studies have long suggested that American adolescents, similar to adults, are significantly less likely to read about, express an interest in, discuss, and be knowledgeable about international issues than national issues. A particularly important finding in recent research, however, is that when students do discuss international issues, they are more likely to discuss them with their teachers than with their parents or peers (Baldi and Others 2001, 87).

Finally, studies suggest that when students can voice their opinions and discuss controversial issues in an open and supportive classroom climate they are more likely to exhibit higher levels of political knowledge, tolerance, efficacy, and interest (Hahn 1998; Torney-Purta and Others 2001). But one of the most disturbing findings from the recent research is the persistent gap between the opportunities that minority students and students in the majority have to develop their "social capital," resources that enhance one's ability to participate in political and civic activities. Students from urban and immigrant communities are less likely than other Americans to experience controversial issues discussions and to develop skills in responding effectively and responsibly to public issues.

What are some of the implications of the research for the nature and content of university courses in social studies teaching methods? The following suggestions are purposefully specific, and most methods instructors could implement parts or all of each suggestion without significantly revising their syllabi.

Assign Interviews with Young People. Preservice teachers should complete assignments that help them understand how young people think about social and political concepts and issues. Joseph Adelson's classic interviews with adolescents, conducted more than 40 years ago, still stand as a model for understanding young people's thinking about social and political concepts. He posed hypothetical situations such as the following: "Imagine that a thousand people venture to an island in the Pacific to form a new society; once there they must compose a political order, devise a legal system, and in general confront the myriad problems of government" (1971, 1014). Based on the scenario, hypothetical laws and potential conflicts within the community were presented to the youth. For example, should a law be passed to prohibit smoking? Should a dissenting religious group be vaccinated? Other scenarios pertaining to global warming and homelessness have been developed by Torney-Purta (1989, 1990). Preservice teachers could learn much about young people's political thinking by posing these and similar situations to students.

Preservice teachers could also interview young people about specific democratic practices. For example, students are quick to associate democracy with the concept of "freedom of expression," but gentle probing about its role in sustaining a democracy will likely demonstrate students' superficial understandings of this principle. By talking with young people about their understanding of basic democratic concepts and issues, preservice teachers can learn the limits of students' understandings and discuss how teachers can deepen those understandings.

Teach Methods for Connecting Concepts. Preservice teachers should become familiar with basic methods and tools that help students see connections among concepts. Study after study has shown that students are familiar with the terms associated with democracy, but have difficulty putting them together in a coherent framework. Schema theory suggests that strategies such as concept mapping and graphic organizers can help students link existing knowledge with new knowledge. Additionally, research indicates that teachers should make explicit connections between political concepts (e.g., freedom of expression) and institutions (e.g., courts, media).

Patricia Avery is a Professor in the College of Education of the University of Minnesota.

Teach Methods to Develop Skills in Taking Perspectives on Public Issues. The preservice teacher should develop a repertoire of methods for enhancing students' perspective-taking skills about controversial public issues. They should experience methods such as role-play, simulations, dialogue poems, seminars, scored discussions, and public issues discussions. Leading class discussions about controversial issues and helping students to see multiple perspectives are two very complex teaching skills. For preservice teachers, who are typically concerned about classroom management, leading class discussions is a daunting task. But some strategies, such as *structured academic controversy*, developed by David Johnson and Roger Johnson, afford beginning teachers the control they may initially lack to conduct discussions. At the same time, extensive research on the effects of structured controversy suggests that participants develop more positive attitudes toward conflict, demonstrate higher levels of moral reasoning and perspective-taking, and develop more positive attitudes toward working with individuals from different racial and ethnic groups (Johnson and Johnson 1989).

Integrate International Perspectives and Issues into Lessons. Demonstration lessons are a standard part of methods classes. Teacher educators can use the subject of international issues to demonstrate various teaching methods. Students can also learn about and practice integrating global perspectives into their lesson plans. Most important, preservice teachers need to understand that the classroom is the primary place in which students talk about international issues; if teachers ignore international issues and perspectives in their teaching, many students will not be exposed to them.

Teach about Students' Access to Social Capital. Methods instructors should help beginning teachers understand that the development of civic identity and social capital is a dynamic process that takes place in a social and cultural context. This is particularly apparent in the consistent differences in students' political knowledge and attitudes as well as differences in students' school experiences. For example, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds consistently demonstrate lower levels of civic knowledge; these same students also report a less open and supportive classroom climate and fewer opportunities to discuss social and political issues than do their counterparts. Can this be changed? Over the past 35 years, important strides have been made to improve the school and classroom environment for females, suggesting that change is possible. But our preservice teachers need to be aware of the problem before they can work together to address it.

Finally, although methods courses are an important part of the beginning teacher's preparation, research on teachers' professional development emphasizes that teachers must continually develop their teaching knowledge and skills. Teacher educators can play a major role in helping teachers periodically reflect on the ways in which their teaching methods, classroom climate, and school culture impact young citizens. There is a critical need for more research on the ways in which teacher education can enable preservice and experienced teachers to develop a more engaged and enlightened citizenry.

References and ERIC Resources. The following list of resources includes references used to prepare this Digest. The items followed by an ED number are available in microfiche, paper, or electronic full text from the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). For information about prices, contact EDRS, 7420 Fullerton Road, Suite 110, Springfield, Virginia 22153-2852; World Wide Web <edrs.com>; telephone numbers are (703) 440-1400 and (800) 443-3742. Entries followed by an EJ number, annotated monthly in CURRENT INDEX TO JOURNALS IN EDUCATION (CIJE), are not available through EDRS. However, they can be located in the journal section of most larger libraries by using the bibliographic information provided, requested through Interlibrary Loan, or ordered from commercial reprint services.

Adelson, Joseph. "The Political Imagination of the Young Adolescent." DAEDALUS 100 (Fall 1971): 1013-1050. EJ 052 533.

Baldi, Stephane, and Others. WHAT DEMOCRACY MEANS TO NINTH-GRADERS: U.S. RESULTS FROM THE INTERNATIONAL IEA CIVIC EDUCATION STUDY. Washington DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2001. EJ 454 152.

Conover, Pamela Johnston, and Donald D. Searing. "A Political Socialization Perspective." In Lorraine M. McDonnell, P. Michael Timpane, and Roger Benjamin, Eds., REDISCOVERING THE DEMOCRATIC PURPOSES OF EDUCATION. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000, 91-124. ED 456 067.

Hahn, Carole L. BECOMING POLITICAL: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES ON CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION. Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998. ED 426 920.

Johnson, David W., and Roger T. Johnson. COOPERATION AND COMPETITION: THEORY AND RESEARCH. Edina, MN: Interaction Book Company, 1989.

Sinatra, Gale, and Others. "A Longitudinal Characterization of Young Students' Knowledge Of Their Country's Government." AMERICAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL 29 (Fall 1992): 633-661. EJ 453 792.

Torney-Purta, Judith. "Adolescents' Schemata of Society, Self and Others: An Approach to Conceptualizing and Measuring Adolescents' Understanding of the Public Good." Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Kansas City, MO, April 1989. ED 312 077.

Torney-Purta, Judith. "From Attitudes and Knowledge to Schemata: Expanding the Outcomes of Political Socialization Research." In Orit Ichilov, Ed. POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION, CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION, AND DEMOCRACY. New York: Teachers College Press, 1990, 98-133.

Torney-Purta, Judith, Rainer Lehmann, Hans Oswald, and Wolfram Schulz. CITIZENSHIP AND EDUCATION IN TWENTY-EIGHT COUNTRIES: CIVIC KNOWLEDGE AND ENGAGEMENT AT AGE FOURTEEN. Amsterdam: International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, 2001. ED 452 116.

This project has been funded at least in part with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education under contract number ED-99-CO-0016. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. ERIC Digests are in the public domain and may be freely reproduced and disseminated.

U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

NOTICE

Reproduction Basis

[ ] This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.

[X] This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").